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## GENERAL SAMUEL THOMAS.

FOUNDER OF WYOMING, STARK COUNTY, ILLINOIS.

BY WILLIAM R. SANDHAM, WYOMING, ILLINOIS.

Among those who came to Illinois in the fall of 1834 to make a home here was General Samuel Thomas, from the Wyoming Valley in Pennsylvania. In June, 1835, he bought of the United States government the northeast quarter of Section two in what is now Essex township, Stark county, then a part of Putnam county. In March, 1836, by the aid of B. M. Hayes, then county surveyor of Putnam county, General Thomas laid out a town in the northeast corner of the said quarter section. The newly laid-out town consisted of eighteen blocks, one of which was designated as a public square and dedicated to the use of the people as long as the town shall last. To commemorate his old home in Pennsylvania, he named the new town Wyoming.

In order that the memory of General Thomas shall endure forever the trustees of the village, now city of Wyoming, at a meeting held March 7, 1898, by ordinance, declared that the public square shall thereafter be known as Thomas Park. The park is marked with a large piece of Bedford limestone on which in deep letters is the inscription:

### THOMAS PARK

1836

General Samuel Thomas, the founder of the town of Wyoming, Stark county, Illinois, and one of its most enterprising and public spirited citizens until the infirmities of old age came upon him, was born in Connecticut, February 2, 1787, the year of the adoption of that great ordinance which created the Northwest Territory, and two years before the going into effect of the constitution of the United States. He lived in Connecticut until he was nineteen years old. He attended the common

schools of that state and became fairly well educated. In 1806 he moved with his parents to the township of Kingston, Lucerne county, in what is historically known as the Wyoming Valley, Pennsylvania. It was in Kingston township where occurred that event in the Revolutionary war known as the Wyoming massacre, July 3, 1778. It is in this valley that the scenes of Campbell's celebrated poem, "Gertrude of Wyoming," are laid. The Valley was settled by people from Connecticut in 1762.

March 10, 1807, Mr. Thomas was married to Miss Marcia Pettebone, daughter of Oliver Pettebone, of Kingston, Pennsylvania, and soon after took up the occupation of farming. He very soon began to take part in the various activities of his new home. Among these activities was an enthusiastic military company which he joined and in a few years became its captain. When the war of 1812 broke out the company was well drilled in artillery practice and under the best of discipline. The services of the company were promptly tendered to the government and equally as promptly accepted.

The company, made up of about a hundred men, all under twenty-five years of age, was ordered to Erie, Pennsylvania, where it did most excellent work in protecting Commodore Perry, who was directing the building of boats and getting ready to fight the battle of Lake Erie, better known in history as Perry's Victory. Later the company was sent to join the army of General William Henry Harrison, and took part October 5, 1813, in the battle of Thames, Canada, in which the celebrated Indian chief Tecumseh, was killed. After returning from Canada the company took an active and very serviceable part in the military campaigns around Detroit and Lake Erie. At the close of the war Captain Thomas was appointed inspector of the Pennsylvania militia, and in 1828 he became a brigadier general by appointment of the governor of Pennsylvania. He held that position until he moved to Illinois in 1834. While a resident of Pennsylvania he served two terms in the legislature of that state.

In the year 1834 bright visions appeared in the west to General Thomas, in which he could see a better and more prosperous home for himself and family on the broad and fertile

prairies of Illinois. He bade goodbye to the beautiful valley where he had struggled and had been fairly successful, the valley where his wife and children were born and where he had been honored by his friends and neighbors. Leaving three daughters who were married and presiding over homes of their own, General Thomas, accompanied by his wife and three younger children, William F., Ruth Anne and James M., started out to answer the call from the west. After a tedious and tiresome journey of forty-two days, traveling with loaded wagons and camping out at night, he arrived in October, 1834, at the cabin of Sylvanus Moore, his brother-in-law, a short distance southwest of the present center of Wyoming. He bought Mr. Moore's claim, and in June, 1835, he received a deed or a patent as it is called, from the United States, for the land. Later he bought several pieces of land in what is now Essex and Toulon townships.

Soon after coming here General Thomas began farming and merchandising and followed these occupations until the coming of old age put a bar on his activities. Two of his sons-in-law and their wives came from Pennsylvania in 1836. The names of these sons-in-law were Whitney Smith and John W. Agard.

As heretofore stated General Thomas founded the town of Wyoming in March, 1836. He lived to see it have two railroads and become an enterprising and prosperous town. He always loved the town which he established, and was very proud of its growth and progress after the coming of the railroads.

Besides giving the public square for the use of the people for all time, he gave land for a school, for a Methodist church and a parsonage. Soon after the town was laid out he gave land for a public burial ground, which is now a part of the Wyoming cemetery.

General Thomas and his wife were lifelong devoted members of the Methodist Episcopal church. When the pioneer preachers came this way they were always made cordially welcome at the hospitable home of General and Mrs. Thomas. All incoming settlers were also made welcome at their home until they had established homes of their own, often with the aid of

their liberal entertainers. Very often this hospitality was taxed to its utmost but it was always cheerfully given.

From his first vote in 1808, General Thomas was in politics a democrat, and a devoted adherent of the principles of his party. He was elected a member of the Illinois General Assembly in 1846. His son James M. and his grandson, James M. Jr., held the office of postmaster in Wyoming during the first and second administrations of President Grover Cleveland respectively.

General Thomas became a member of the Masonic order while living in Pennsylvania. When the Toulon Masonic lodge was established in 1850 he was enrolled as one of its charter members, his name appearing on the charter of the lodge.

Mrs. Thomas died July 21, 1865. Mrs. Shallenberger, in her book "Stark County and Its Pioneers," said: "Mrs. Thomas was a woman who fought life's battles with a quiet courage no hardships could subdue, yet she wore her honors meekly. Her home was ever the abode of a refined and generous hospitality."

After the death of his wife, General Thomas made his home with his son-in-law, Rev. John W. Agard, until the time of his death, July 7, 1879. His was a long and eventful life, 92 years, 5 months and 5 days. He and his wife were laid to rest in the Wyoming cemetery. There also are resting near them his sons, William F. and James M., their wives, his daughter Martha P., her husband John W. Agard, and several grandchildren. The daughter Ruth Anne married Giles C. Dana in May, 1836, and died eight weeks afterward in Peoria.

The name Giles C. Dana is a familiar one to many of the residents of Wyoming, as it often appears in deeds and tax receipts. Mr. Dana laid out and gave name to Giles C. Dana's addition to Wyoming.

After all these years there are no descendants of General Thomas living in Wyoming, and only two in Stark county, Judge Frank Thomas and daughter Julia of Toulon. Judge Thomas is a grandson of General Thomas.

The Wyoming public library is adorned by a fine portrait of General Thomas, a gift of J. Ward Thomas of Chicago, a great grandson of the general.